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A Guide to the Katydids of Australia

by David Rentz

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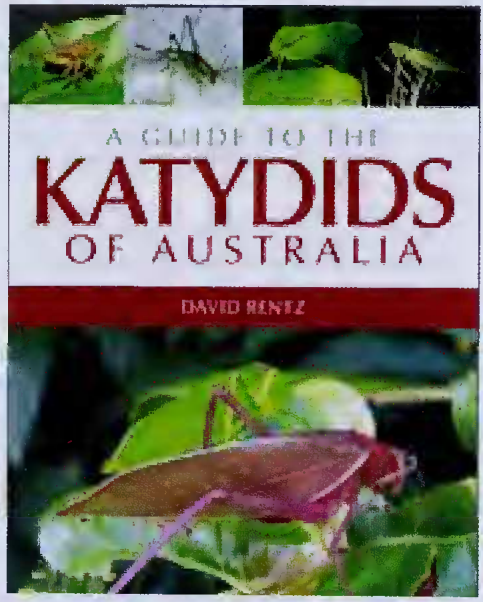
If the question 'what is a katydid?' was posed to many Australians, it would result in a blank stare or, as I often hear, the response 'some kind of cicada'? It seems that although many of us live with these intriguing insects in our very yards, they are not a well-known group at all. Even when people come face to face with these insects, they are more often than not identified as 'green grasshoppers'. The author David Rentz certainly does know this group well; after all, his life has been spent studying this particular group of orthopteran insects. Long after his retirement from CSIRO he continues to channel his energies into this group of insects, the Tettigoniidae, which he is most passionate about.



This book is another excellent title in CSIRO's guide series. It is rich with high quality images and structured quite well. It is more focused than the other titles, however, featuring just one family. This is by no means a limitation as potentially there are 1000 species within this group. So, as with most invertebrate guides, it is practically impossible to cover all species within any given topic. Besides which, the author continues to describe new ones!

The introductory section takes readers through a detailed overview of katydids, and differentiates them from some of their close relatives such as crickets and grasshoppers. Fascinating facts about the family are revealed, and an overview of the diversity within the Tettigoniidae is provided. It is evident within this introduction that the author assumes the

reader has a reasonable level of biological and entomological understanding. This certainly doesn't exclude the layperson, but those new to entomology will need to use the glossary provided.

Chapter two examines katydid biology, covering reproduction, feeding, and even provides an insight into the predators and parasites that rely on this group of insects. Sound and hearing (Chapter three) explains in detail how and why katydids create the sounds that are as much a part of the Australian summer as those of cicadas. Chapter four provides an insightful look at collection and study techniques. Some very valuable tips can be gained here for those looking at studying this family. These are complemented by Chapters five and six, which cover habitats and conservation.

The body of the book, of course, is the guide to species (Chapter seven). This large family is broken into 14 subfamilies. The order of presentation follows a traditional phylogenetic scheme: the more primitive groups are listed first, followed by more advanced. Each of the 14 subfamilies is broken down to genus and species level and where applicable the larger subfamilies also include tribe and subtribe levels.

Each species listing is accompanied by a paragraph of text on known distribution, as well as details about characteristics such as behaviour or physiology that would aid identification. Colour photographs are provided adjacent to the description of each species. There appears to be no set formula to the layout of the species descriptions and accompanying photographs; however, the locations and labelling of images makes it quite simple to match them up quickly. The publication uses photographs of the various species in their habitats, as illustrations, which I find much more helpful for identification purposes in the field than photographs of faded preserved specimens.

A useful key to the 14 subfamilies is provided at the end of the species guide, along with a list of the Tettigoniidae of Australia. A three-page glossary is included and is vital for those new to the field. Appendix 1 presents a quick overview of keeping katydids alive and of preserving specimens, and Appendix 2 lists special interest groups and entomological supplies. While Appendix 2 is useful now, it is likely to date reasonably quickly.

This is an excellent book, and the only guide available on this specialised group of insects. Needless to say, for those interested in this group it is a must-have item, whether it is for formal study or to find out which species is calling from the shrub in the backyard. It is nicely presented and for the most part very user friendly.

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Fifty-two Years Ago

A Dyed Grasshopper

Miss Joan Ridsdale, of Camberwell Girls' High School, sent a small red grasshopper and a battery of questions regarding it. It was a second-stage nymph of *Caedicia valida,* one of the common species of "long-horn" grasshoppers. The adults are usually referred to as katydids; they are green and have large wings. Katydids are not pests. The interesting thing about this particular nymph was its *red* colour, and, when the matter was put to Mr. A. N. Burns of the National Museum, he suggested that it had been feeding on something pink, possibly young rose shoots.

From *The Victorian Naturalist* **LXXVI**, p. 185, November 5, 1959